(b) Export of tea from India during the last three years have been as under:—

Year	Qty. (Mn..Kgs)	Value (Rs.Crores)
1995-96	167.47	1244.52
1996-97	169.04	1301.46
1997-98	211.76	1953.91

(c) Orders for export are received directly by the Traders/Exporters. The Govt, is not in a position to indicate the amount of orders for tea export received by them. However it is estimated that around 220 Mn. Kgs of tea is likely to be exported during the year 1999-2000.

(d) and (c) Yes, Sir, The gardens in Assam, North Bengal as well as South India have experienced an unprecedented long dry spell during the first three months of 1999. While this has resulted in substantial crop reduction in South India during the first two months of (Jan-Fcb), 1999, the same has adversely affected the crop production in north India during March' 99. Insofar as the impact of the drought conditions on tea exports is concerned, it is too early to indicate the same. The Board has sent an advisory Circular to all the Tea Producer Associations indicating the measures to be taken by them for minimising the impact of drought. The Producer Associations have been requested to bring this to the notice of all the member garden.

Duty Free Import of Tea

2960. SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA:
SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA:
SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have allowed duty free import of tea from SAARC countries;

(b) if so, whether Government have critically examined its impact on the domestic tea industry and overall market prices;

(c) whether the Assam Chief Minister has represented in this regard;

(d) if so, what are the details thereof and Government's reaction thereto; and

(c) the manner in which Government propose to give relief to the domestic tea industry?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (c) Under the terms of the Indo-Sri Lanks FTA signed in December 1998, the two sides are to exchange the lists of items on which duty preferences shall be given and items on which no duty preferences shall be given for the present. The lists are under finalisation and consultations are being held with Sir Lanka in this regard. While preparing the lists from our side, consultations have been held with the concerned Ministries and which the Industry & trade. Due importance has been given to the representations received from various quarters including the State Governments.

The Chief Minister of Assam has written to the Prime Minister requesting that import of Tea should not be allowed duty free under the Free Trade Agreement.

Duty concessions being provided on various items under the Agreement will be available only on the Basic Customs Duty and not on Special Additional Customs Duty and the Additional Customs Duty in lieu of Central excise.

Misuse of DEPB Scheme

2961. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Duty Entitlement Passbook Schemes are greatly being misused by the exporters and the Ministry of Finance wants to plug loopholes and check growth misuse of the schemes;

(b) if so, the details of the cases of misuse of DEPB that have come to light in the last three years, year-wise; and

(c) the action taken by the Government against the guilty exporters?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (c) Although there have been some instances of misuse of DEPB scheme, it would not be correct to take the view that the scheme is greatly being misued by the exporters. Various steps have already been taken in consultation with Ministry of Finance to prevent scope of misuse of the scheme. Details of the measures taken for checking misuse include (i) value cap on items which have a DEPB rate of 15% or more; (ii) introduction of Present market Value (PMV) assessment system; (iii) Verification of Shipping Bills before credit is used to clear import consignments; (iv) Scaling down of DEPB rates on number of items. In cases of fraud, suppression of facts or misrepresentation penal action is initiated jointly by DRI & Directorate General of Foreign Trade. Investigations have been initiated against 38 firms. 13 persons have been arrested and penalties and fines have been imposed in two cases.

श्रीलंका से शुल्क मुक्त माल का आयात

2962. **श्री खान गुफ़रान ज़ाहिदी** : क्या वाणिज्य मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि :

(क) क्या सरकार ने श्रीलंका से चाय, रबर व नारियल को शुल्क मुक्त आयात को अनुमति न देने का निर्णय लिया हैं,

(ख) यदि हां, तो क्या वे वस्तुएं भारत व श्रीलंका के बीच हुए ऐतिहासिक मुक्त व्यापार समझौते में शामिल हैं, और

(ग) इन वस्तुओं को समझौते से बाहर रखने के क्या कारण हैं ?

वाणिज्य मंत्री (श्री रामकृष्ण हेगड़े) : (क) से (ग) भारत और श्रीलंका के बीच मुक्त व्यापार करार के उपबंधों के तहत दोनों देशों को उन वस्तुओं की सूची का आदान-प्रदान करना होगा जिन पर टैरिफ अधिमान उपलब्ध होंगे तथा जिन वस्तुओं पर टैरिफ अधिमान उपलब्ध नहीं होंगे ये सूचियां तैयार की जा रही हैं । सूचियां तैयार करते समय विभिन्न मंत्रालयों, राज्या सरकारों, उद्योग तथा व्यापार संघों आदि की चिन्ताओं पर समुचित विचार किया गया हैं ।

VRS in Coffee Board

2963. SHRI E. BALANANDAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) how many employees and officers of the Coffee Board in Groups I,B,C, and D have been relieved under the V.R.S, since 1995-96;

(b) whether all those who opted the VRS have received pension, gratuity, ex-gratia, leave salary etc. due to them; and

(c) if not, the reasons and group-wise details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) A total number of 1684 officials comprising 12 Group A, 100 Group B, 945 Group C & 627 Group D have been relieved under Voluntary Retirement Scheme since 1995-96.

(b) and (c) The settlement of pension, gratuity, ex-gratia and leave salary for all the officials who have availed of Voluntary Retirement Schemes has been effected in full.

Decline in Exports to Traditional Markets

2964. SHRI S. PETER ALPHONSE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian Exports have declined during 1997-98 and 1998-99;

(b) whether it is also a fact that exports to some of our traditional markets